Connecticut

& Tobacco

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Chapter in America's Industrial Growth

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Tobacco History Series

THE TOBACCO INSTITUTE
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Tobacco production methods and tobacco marketing procedures are identical in Connecticut and Massachusetts. *Massachusetts and Tobacco* is also available for readers.

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Connecticut and Tobacco

A dozen years after the settlement of Plymouth, Massachusetts, a group of restless colonists was preparing to migrate to the territory the Indians called "Quinnitukq-ut": "at the long tidal river." Independently, Dutchmen from Manhattan Island were organizing a colonizing party for the same area, which the English called "Connecticut." The Dutch moved a little earlier than their English rivals. In June 1633 they built a fort on land that later became Hartford. Three or four months after, despite the manned, menacing cannon of the Dutch, the Plymouth men sailed past the fort, set up a frame house prefabricated at Plymouth, and thus established the first English trading post on the site of present Windsor. The proximity of the Connecticut River made both settlements practical choices.

Apart from the compulsive extension of boundaries that coincided with nationalistic policies, new settlers hoped to find sources of supply that would not only make them self-supporting but might develop into export commodities. A powerful economic goad was the production of tobacco.

Immigrant Europeans, particularly in North America, had noted with envy and admiration Virginia's success with tobacco. That sole commodity had not only saved England's original colony from failure; it had developed an affluent export trade for Virginians. Perhaps, it was thought, that success could be repeated elsewhere. It is a curiosity of history that the original Dutch and English settlements in Connecticut were in the very areas that some two and a half centuries later were to become the heart of Connecticut's valuable tobaccoland.

In the initial years of settlement, efforts to produce tobacco suitable for smokers at home and abroad were defeated by the forces of nature. The ancient native type stubbornly retained its pungent characteristic despite European methods of culture designed to tame it. Even later, when seeds were imported from Virginia or, possibly, the West Indies and planted in Connecticut, the resulting leaf did not provide a flavorful smoke. Time was to show that the soil of the Valley was excellent for several types of tobacco. But it was to take imagination and experimentation and the knowledge of patient agriculturists before Connecticut farmers could establish themselves among the important producers of fine tobaccos.

Tobacco map

Almost all tobacco agriculture in Connecticut is confined to the attractive, fertile valley through which the Connecticut River runs. This farming area is locally known as Tobacco Valley. An air view would show it roughly in the shape of an elongated cone. With its base

at Portland, Connecticut, it runs through central Connecticut and western Massachusetts to its apex at the border of Vermont and New Hampshire.

The majority of the tobacco harvested in the Valley is a product of Connecticut and particularly of Hartford County; only a fraction is farmed in Tolland County and even less is produced in Middlesex County. The only other section of the state where tobacco is commercially grown lies in the west-central area around New Milford in the Housatonic Valley.

Aerial view of tents for shade-grown tobacco
Courtesy Connecticut Development Commission

Leaf trio

The crops of Connecticut tobacco farms are solely cigar-leaf types. They are:

- Connecticut Valley shade-grown, a wrapper leaf. Pro-

duced on 4,200 acres in 1970, the harvests of this type totaled 6,400,000 pounds. The value of the year's crop was more than $25.8 billion.

- Connecticut Broadleaf, a binder type. The 1970 crop from 1,300 acres came to over 2.2 million pounds and was valued at $1.4 million.
- Connecticut Havana Seed, also a binder type. This type is grown on fewer than 100 acres and significant production data are not available.

Binder leaf comes within the provisions of the federal price support program. Marketing quotas for binder types have been in effect since the early 1950's; in 1970 there were 487 Connecticut allotments of 5,083 acres. The income from Connecticut-grown tobacco in 1970 represented 13.6 percent of the cash receipts of the state's farm commodities.

The versatile plant

The leaf area of a fully matured cigar-tobacco plant measures an average 25 square feet. Any of these types could provide the leaf components of a cigar. These are the core or filler that supplies the flavor and aroma, the heavier, elastic binder that shapes and holds the bunched filler, and the wrapper or cover of the cigar. For the past half century and longer, however, filler, binder, and wrapper types have been separately developed to supply the specific leaves required for cigars.

Technological and economic conditions may force a change in the differentiation of cigar-tobacco types. A

few years ago a variety described as an "all-purpose tobacco" was experimentally produced in Glastonbury, Connecticut. The yield was high: 2,800 pounds an acre. Whether this novel tobacco of the Broadleaf type, or some similar, will succeed in lowering production costs and supply a leaf of high quality, will depend on further experimentation.

Harvested Broadleaf tobacco ready for the curing barns
Courtesy Conn-Mass Tobacco Cooperative

The troublesome plant

A field of tobacco ready for harvesting is an impressive sight of sturdy, sound plants with leaves of generous proportions. Tobacco has the appearance of a favored product of nature, one that comes to full bloom more or less spontaneously. The appearance is deceptive, for tobacco is a remarkably sensitive plant that does not grow unaided.

Bringing a crop of tobacco to wholesome maturity requires exceptional care on the part of growers. No field crops are more difficult to produce and none exact more manual labor. Mechanical aids such as power-drawn transplanters have eliminated some occupational backaches. Other labor-reducing devices are currently under advanced study or experiment, and a leaf-picking machine is being tested. Generally, however, from the time seedbeds are prepared and sown, through cultivation and harvesting to curing and packing for warehouses, tobacco farming is plain hard work that continues through most of each year.

The leaf that binds

Broadleaf and Havana Seed are known as "sun-grown," "open-field" or "outdoor" tobaccos as distinct from "shade-grown." The fields producing these binder types usually cover only four or five acres. Tobacco farmers are very likely to be growing other crops as well, and some go in for dairy products and poultry. Producing tobacco is more often than not a family enterprise, with all hands being most useful at transplanting and harvesting times. They will be especially active, too, during the intermittent periods of hostilities against plagues of insects.

A tablespoonful of tiny seeds will produce around a ton of binder tobacco. Mature plants of this type are cut down whole, speared onto sticks in lots of five or six and left lying briefly on the ground to wilt. Then they are removed to barns and hung on tier poles to be cured by air and, when weather conditions require it, by supplementary heat from indoor fires. Curing will take five to eight weeks.

Growing cigar-wrapper tobacco under tents
Courtesy Cigar Institute of America

Sheets of leaf

Over a decade and a half ago, a technological development occurred which meant an uncertain future for Connecticut Valley tobacco farmers. Following 1955, there was a progressive reduction in the production of Broadleaf and Havana Seed harvested in the Valley.

The development has been described as a reclamation program that salvages up to 40 percent of natural leaf which was formerly partly converted to non-binder use or partly wasted. When leaves are cut into binder size, the unused part goes into a commercial product less profitable than cigars, known as "scrap." ("Scrap," which also includes cuttings during cigar manufacture, is a standard official term for leaf fragments that are used for some chewing tobacco and filler.)

Lengthy research finally resulted in the creation of a man-made binder. Through this process sound tobacco is pulverized, bound with a cohesive, and then rolled into small sheets of binder width. Almost all of the leaf weight is thus utilized and provides a binder of uniform thickness and quality. Not only have the taste and aroma of natural binder been preserved in this manufactured leaf; tests have shown improvement in combustibility.

The sheets are automatically fed from a spool into cigar-making machines. Reconstituted tobacco has thus substantially reduced labor costs formerly required by hand stamping and hand feeding binders into cigar-making machines. Classified as "manufactured binder sheet," this product is accepted by the responsible federal departments for what it actually is: tobacco. A portion of reconstituted leaf is being used as wrappers on small cigars.

Wrappers and reapers

During the period of declining binder production, the Connecticut-grown, shade-grown type generally showed crop stability. The harvest total in 1970 was about the

same as that of 1955. The steadfast pace was maintained despite announcements in 1959 and 1960 that wrappers for large cigars had become available in manufactured sheet. The new form was said to retain the desirable characteristics of the natural wrapper leaf in its "wet strength," "chewability," and resilience or stretch. It was also stated that the better grades of natural leaf would be used for luxury cigars.

Meanwhile, as is clear from the production total in 1970, farmers of the type grown especially to provide wrappers are maintaining their long-established agriculture. (An account of the cultural routine applied to shade-grown leaf in Tobacco Valley is given in the companion booklet, *Massachusetts and Tobacco.* Also described there is the system of erecting miles of tents to provide the shade and humidity that thin the growing leaf and produce the desired texture and color; the process of harvesting and curing, together with various other subjects associated with this specialized agriculture.)

The harvesting of shade-grown tobacco in the late summer requires a large labor force including many young men and women on vacation from schools and colleges in Connecticut. Thousands of workers also come from other states, from Puerto Rico and the West Indies.

Light shade

The devoted care which sees wrapper tobacco through the fields and the curing barns is but a prelude to the exacting procedures whereby it is prepared for the market. The "hand-caressed" leaf is arranged in piles of two to three tons weight in processing warehouses. Fermen-

Priming, or picking the leaves of shade-grown tobacco
Photograph by Hunton. Courtesy U.S. Dept. of Agriculture

tation is induced by this building of leaf bulks. Four to six times, every eight or ten days, the bulks are rebuilt so that the outside leaves become the center of the piles. Thermometers placed in the middle of the bulks are regularly read to determine the degree of "sweat."

The burning quality of the leaf, the delicacy of its taste, and its color are improved by this fermentation. Leaves of very light color—the current preference—will command the highest prices. Nature works in her own patient time in fermenting the sensitive leaf. Efforts are being made, however, to accelerate the process without upsetting the harmonious balance of aroma, texture and

color. Within the past few years many processors have abandoned the use of large bulks. As a labor-saving method they are sweating tobacco in cases and using a plastic covering to speed up fermentation.

The shade of difference

Once bulk fermentation is completed the leaves come under the critical examination of trained workers who separate perfect, and only perfect, leaves into grades of a dozen to twenty or more. Grading is controlled by color, texture and quality. Leaves are then arranged by sizes which run from 8½ to 18 or more inches in length. Packed in wooden cases, the sorted tobacco is stored for six weeks for a final fermentation.

The exacting procedures of preparing wrapper leaf for market reach their conclusion when leaves, in small bundles called "hands," are laid in baling boxes. Each leaf layer is protectively separated from others by soft paper, and packed under pressure. The contents of a bale weight about 30-50 pounds. The bales are covered with grass mats woven in Borneo or with paper matting of American make.

A year or more earlier the wrapper leaf that had passed through so many careful hands had its start in a seed-bed. Though now ready for manufacturing into cigars, not all of it goes into factory bins. Storage warehouses will hold a good part of the leaf until needed for cigar-making machines or the hand rollers who make the most expensive cigars.

Stringing wrapper leaves on automatic sewing mechanism

Leaf markets

Cured binder leaf is bid for at farmers' barns, a marketing pattern that began over a century ago. It is standard procedure for buyers to familiarize themselves with tobacco growing in the fields. They know, therefore, where and how much they will buy and at what range of prices. The average price of the 1970 Broadleaf crop was 65 cents per pound; that for the same year's Havana Seed was 59 cents per pound.

Generally, most of the Havana Seed crops grown in the state goes to the warehouse of the Conn-Mass Tobacco Cooperative at Holyoke, Massachusetts. (This association of Connecticut Valley binder tobacco farmers was organized in 1949.) The tobacco undergoes a few weeks' forced "sweating," an essential fermentation that continues the curing process and mellows the leaf. A considerable part of it will go to manufacturers of scrap chewing tobacco.

Shade-grown tobacco is produced almost entirely for the cigar manufacturers and the packer-dealers who own the farms. Connecticut-grown wrapper leaf was valued at $4.00 per pound for the 1970 crop, the costliest tobacco of domestic growth. That was its farm-sales price. By the time the finest of the wrappers reach the cigar factories the cost will have more than trebled.

Supply network

The cost of equipment, maintenance, materials, supplies and services required in the production of Connecticut tobacco ranges in the tens of millions of dollars

yearly. In Connecticut there are some forty suppliers that meet the varied requirements of farmers and processing warehouses. Across the nation other manufacturers send in equipment, supplies and materials. A cotton-processing firm will, for instance, provide the cloth cover for an acre of wrapper leaf from an acre of cotton grown by some southern farmer. The seasonal requirements for each acre of Connecticut shade-grown tobacco include around two tons of plant nutrient to "sweeten" the soil, many thousand feet of sewing twine, and the numerous items of miscellany regularly needed to keep a properly managed farm functioning.

Curing tobacco with air and heat in a barn
Courtesy The Shade Tobacco Growers Agricultural Association

Packers, producers, purchasers

Apart from farm workers, the largest segment of labor in Connecticut's tobacco industry is in the warehouses where leaf is bulked, sorted, and packed. The manufacturing of tobacco is no longer among the major enterprises of the state. There were, according to the latest census, six cigar factories. Their output was almost 22 million in the fiscal year ending June 1970 out of the nearly 8.4 billion cigars produced nationally. Several Connecticut firms registered as manufacturers of tobacco products, most of them in small-volume operations, and there are two export warehouses.

Foreign markets in 1970 took close to two million pounds of shade tobacco. Of this, 849,390 pounds, valued at $4,058,085, were Connecticut-grown. The United Kingdom received 231,811 pounds, 209,855 pounds were exported to Canada and the Canary Islands received 112,658 pounds of Connecticut-grown shade tobacco. Connecticut Valley Broadleaf tobacco was also another export item for 1970. Broadleaf exports were valued at $360,921 weighing 258,308 pounds. West Germany received the largest amount of this type, 134,733 pounds; the Canary Islands took 48,430, and Jamaica, 24,024 pounds. Of the binder types sent to foreign purchasers, a large portion of the Broadleaf came from Connecticut farms and probably a small part of the Havana Seed also.

Smokers' choice

As holds true throughout the rest of the country, cigarettes represent the major part of retail tobacco sales

Sorting wrapper leaf by sizes and tying into "hands"
Courtesy The Shade Tobacco Growers Agricultural Association

in Connecticut. The retail value of tobacco products was over $165 million. The estimated wholesale value of tobacco commodities distributed in the state in 1970 came to over $85 million. Cigarettes accounted for $76,449,516 of this total; cigars, $8,887,265.

A 1970 trade census shows that there were over 20,000 outlets supplying tobacco to Connecticut consumers. In calendar 1970 cigarette smokers in Connecticut bought 360,100,000 packages.

The first Internal Revenue report in which cigarettes were classified separately from cigars and cheroots was issued as of June 30, 1869. The federal tax yield from this source in Connecticut was $15. In fiscal 1970 it was nearly $30 million from the federal tax of eight cents a package. The gross cigarette state tax for the same fiscal period was $57,913,000.

When the Connecticut tax on cigarettes first became effective, in 1935, the rate was two cents per package of 20. Since then the rate has been changed eight times—once, in 1956, it was dropped a cent to three cents—and increased again five times to its present rate of 21 cents which became effective in July, 1971. Since the inception of the tax the gross income from this source to the state treasury through June 1971 totals $275,190,000.

The entire yield from the cigarette tax now goes into the state's General Fund. In addition to the cigarette excise there is a use tax, a tax on retailers and distributors, and a license fee, applied to operators of automatic dispensers, ranging from $10 for one machine to $150 for 25 or more.

As a segment of taxpayers, tobacco farmers in Connecticut contribute millions of dollars more through taxes assessed locally on properties and inventories.

Ever since the initial years of the colonial period tobacco held a place, eventually an important one, in the economic and social life of Connecticut's inhabitants. The course of its development to its current status was accompanied by some features that are unique in the long history of tobacco in America.

Tobacco rations

The first Dutch and English settlers in Connecticut were not entirely confined to competition in territorial expansion. Both groups came from nations that were then trying to live up to the reputation of being the

world's most determined smokers. Both had become accustomed to the "sweet-scented" leaf of Virginia.

It was a hardship on these pioneers, therefore, to find the tobacco of the newly occupied areas unpalatable. The Dutch had a brief advantage over their English rivals, for they had brought along a small supply of "Virginia." After arrangements had been made for regular shipments of smokable tobacco from Virginia through New Amsterdam to the Dutch, and from Virginia through Plymouth Colony to the English, both settled down in their Connecticut colonies to a watchful peace.

For men only

The Indians of the area, as was general throughout New England, regarded tobacco not only as a "virile" plant but as a sacred one as well. Their squaws were, in consequence of this primitive opinion, excluded from any association with it; they were not permitted to grow or care for it or smoke it.

This could hardly have bothered the females of the various Indian tribes of Connecticut. The native tobacco, of ancient origin, was a small shrubby plant common to eastern North America. Even the braves found its uncured leaves too pungent for use in its natural state.

To their bitter-tasting tobacco, therefore, were added the inner bark of trees (usually dogwood), sumac or other leaves, various herbs, and oil to bind the mixture. The formula varied with different tribes. Blending tobacco for use in pipes was a common practice among northeastern American tribes. The Algonquians had a name for it: "Kinnikinnick," meaning "that which is mixed."

"Pooke" to "shoestring"

As new settlers came into Windsor, and others established themselves at Wethersfield and Hartford, some tried hopefully to improve the native tobacco, called "pooke" by the local Indians. It was a fruitless effort, soon abandoned. Seeds were then obtained from Virginia and very possibly from Barbados.

Small plots were cleared—just enough at first to provide fuel for a man's pipe throughout the year. The leaf that developed from imported seeds was pretty anemic by comparison with the varieties commercially grown in warm and tropical climates. At that, it provided a far better smoke than "pooke." After a number of years of plantings in the sandy soil near the Connecticut River, the plant characteristics of the new type became fixed. It differed from the major commercial varieties grown in the southern English colonies in its heavy, narrow leaves with close veins almost parallel to the stems. Once its special form was fully developed it acquired the name of "shoestring" tobacco.

Protectionist fathers

Not all Connecticut colonists, particularly newcomers, were satisfied with the tobacco that replaced the native variety. When the desirable leaf of Virginia was unavailable through Massachusetts these exacting smokers began to import it directly from England. Exporters in the home country were already sending Virginia leaf to Roger Williams at Providence, Rhode Island. Williams was "much exercised" over the loss of a shipment of

Virginia tobacco, consigned to him from England in 1638.

Importations of "foreign" tobacco became so considerable that in 1640 it was enacted by the General Court at New Haven that, after September 1641

> *no persons within this jurisdiction shall* [*smoke*] *any other Tobacco but such as is or shall be planted within these* [*districts*], *except they have license from the Courte.*

Tobacco brought in from outside the colony was to be licensed by the court. A fine was set for violators who made the mistake of being caught. The stern authors of the law may well have thought that it would curb the use of local tobacco on the theory that no one really liked it.

The result of the regulation was an increase in tobacco production. With so much leaf available in the small communities everyone felt duty bound to keep his pipe lit. Thereupon the watchful General Court repealed the law in 1646 and tried a new tactic the year following. No one was going to charge them with indifference to community welfare.

What the doctor ordered

The new law required that

> *No person under the age of twenty years, nor any other that hath not already accustomed himself to the use thereof, shall take any tobacko, until he hath brought a certificate under the hands of* [*a physician*] *that it is usefull for him, and also, that he hath received a license from the court for the same . . . None*

shall take any tobacko, publickly, in the street [or any open places] unless on a journey of at least ten miles. [Smoking was permitted at dinner time; if not then, not more than once a day at most and then not in company.]

There was but a handful of doctors in the colony. Those few found themselves pressed for time to write out smoking prescriptions ordered by this early "Blue Law." Licensed smokers were among the colony's elite while youths not yet twenty, as might be expected, puffed secretly without sanction.

Some private homes began to assume the character of smoking clubs, and traders increased their orders for tobacco. Everyone concerned seemed to be enjoying himself except members of the Court. Snooping became a fairly profitable private enterprise. All an interested man had to do was to follow his nose, apprehend the villain with the aid of overworked constables, inform in court, prosecute—and collect the high fine, which was 84 pence in 1655.

A considerable volume would be required to list all the tobacco laws and revisions of laws issued by the General Court at New Haven or by community authorities during the early colonial period. Collectively, the regulations proved a futile effort to curb a deeply rooted social custom.

Leaf traffic

The trade in tobacco was not confined to local sales and occasional exportations of the leaf grown in Connecticut. New England merchantmen were running

tobacco from Virginia to the northern settlements. The fact that Great Britain and the Dutch were at war was hardly enough reason for some maritime traders to restrict their established commerce.

A Captain John Manning of Hartford, for instance, carried 71 hogsheads of Virginia leaf on two deliveries to the Dutch at Manhattan Island. He seems to have been doing very well in his small, coastwise trade. Someone turned him in. Thereupon he was tried by the General Court in the month the First Dutch War ended, April 1654, and found guilty of trading with the enemy. That was the year in which the Dutch evacuated their Hartford settlement and the fort.

The normal expansion of settlements within the colony stimulated tobacco production. Leaf of varying quality was a small annual crop in almost every village. Governor John Winthrop (the younger) reported in 1660 that "Some have had good cropes, but [tobacco] is not yet so generally planted as to make a trade of it." In 1662, partly as an encouragement to local farming, but as much out of dislike of anything "foreign," a high duty was placed on imported tobacco: 25 shillings per hogshead or two pence per pound.

Leaf of domestic growth intended for export was then under British colonial regulations to be shipped first to English ports. This was generally regarded as unjust throughout the colonies. (Calculated defiance of this restriction, particularly by New England merchantmen, was an early indication of that spirit of independence which was to harden into open rebellion.) A further proof of agricultural expansion came in 1680 when, in reply to a query from official London, it was stated, "We have no need of Virginia trade, most people planting so much Tabacco."

By the end of the 17th century cured leaf was bringing a better price in Connecticut than the average two pence per pound for which it was selling in Virginia. At Windsor, the original area of tobacco culture, neighbors were paying farmers 3½ to 6 pence per pound. In that period any properly aired room of a private house could serve to cure tobacco. (Separate curing barns were still some time off.) An indication of this practice appeared incidentally in a reference to an Indian attack on a house in the Connecticut Valley town of Deerfield in 1694: "Sara Belding, another of ye daughters, hid herself among some tobacco in ye chamber and so escaped."

Coals to Newcastle

By the early 1700's, enough of the leaf was being grown in and around Wethersfield and Windsor to leave a residue for export. A number of Connecticut exporters found a small but fairly profitable market in Barbados and the other parts of the British West Indies where slaves had expressed a preference for a strong, heavy smoke. Small shipments were sometimes sent to England by barter merchants. All the exportations were ordinarily a part of mixed cargoes. Ship owners occasionally advertised for a ton or more of "Windsor tobacco" to help fill a hold.

A casual manufacturing was being carried on through the processing of leaves into rolls and twists ("pigtail")—an old, Spanish-colonial form. When exported, some of these brought higher prices abroad than Connecticut leaf in bulk, as indicated by a price range of 2 pence to 8 pence per pound.

Worthless tobacco was too often included in these shipments. This abuse of good trading practice finally brought action from the General Assembly. An "Act to regulate Curing and Packing of Tobacco, and prevent Fraud therein," passed in 1753, curbed the careless or dishonest trader. Official packers were, thereafter, elected in tobacco-producing towns. The improved quality of export leaf which resulted helped to maintain the small overseas markets and benefited domestic buyers. Sound, cured tobacco was accepted in payment of taxes in a number of communities.

The local "chaw"

Along with the use of tobacco in pipes and, to a lesser degree, as snuff, chewing became fairly popular in Connecticut, particularly in its seaports. Virginia leaf was then being manufactured into cheap plug tobacco. As a home industry, Connecticut farmers and their wives concocted their own form of "chaw." Their 18th century name for this plug was "fudgeon," a term that suggests the leaf was heavily sauced with a sugary syrup.

The great importation

The assumed first entry of cigars into Connecticut gave rise to an account that became a respected tradition among the natives of Connecticut. Its importance may be gauged by the persistence with which the incident is repeated in local and general histories. The event took place shortly before the Seven Years' War had reached its conclusion in Europe, November 1762. England's

military operations against Spain had included a siege of Havana. One of the field officers in the assault on that city was Lieutenant-Colonel Israel Putnam of Pomfret, Connecticut. Later, he became widely known as "Old Put" of Bunker Hill and Revolutionary War fame.

When Colonel Putnam returned to his home town in late 1762 he acquired a fame far beyond that of a hero back from war. As a field officer he received a considerable share of the "enormous booty" that resulted from the fall of Havana. Included in his portion was reported to be an impressive quantity of the finest Havana cigars.

In the Connecticut seaport at which he transferred his possessions from ship to shore, three local donkeys were needed to pack his prizes. No self-respecting Yankee donkey would carry less than 200 pounds—more, with a little urging. With allowances for the weight of equipment, luggage and souvenirs, there must have been many thousand cigars loaded on the animals.

Legend—or reality?

The report that Putnam first brought rare Havanas to Connecticut—the first man indeed to import any cigars into the colony—had a reasonable basis which made it fairly widespread at the time. Putnam had been a smoker before he went to Havana. Long before the British campaign, cigars made in that city had acquired a reputation as the absolute best. How then could an experienced smoker resist an opportunity to acquire, without cost, the most expensive of smoking commodities?

When the pieces of evidence are assembled they do suggest that the incident of importation actually occurred. Furthermore, when the heroic son of Connecti-

cut opened an inn at Pomfret, he had ambrosial cigars to offer patrons and friends. Their scent reached across the countryside and pervaded the Valley. Farmers, sniffing the aroma, were inspired to improve the quality of their tobacco and produce a better leaf for cigars. But they were premature; the better leaf was still nearly a century off.

The pioneer cigars

Putnam may have been responsible for a trend. For within a generation of his time, there was a swing in the taste of Connecticut smokers to cigars. West Indian cigars were coming into the state by 1791, the year in which an advertisement offering "segars" first appeared in the *Connecticut Courant*. But it was not before 1795 that this commodity, manufactured in Cuba, was being imported into the United States in any substantial quantity. In 1799 the *Connecticut Courant* published the first advertisement of "segars" of domestic manufacture.

Except for cigarettes, then still rare, all recreative forms of using tobacco were being practiced in Connecticut. The older, confirmed smokers were clinging to their pipes, though tobacco chewing was fairly popular among farmers and sailors. In Europe the age of snuff was coming to its end, but many Americans, particularly among the wealthy, were devoted to the scented tobacco powder. The General Assembly in 1784 had awarded a 25-year snuff-manufacturing monopoly (with tax exemption for 14 years) to one of Connecticut's highly respected jurists, William Pitkin.

The trend to cigars became more obvious in the early 1800's. It was to result in considerable economic gains

for Connecticut, where cigar manufacturing had its origin. The rolling of cigars as a home industry had its apparent beginning in the Windsor district of the state before 1800. It soon spread throughout the Valley in Connecticut and to the eastern districts. By that time mere males, who had generally approved of the old Indian custom of keeping women and tobacco far apart, were encouraging the gainful occupation of their wives and daughters. Local store-keepers took the crude, home-made cigars in exchange for goods; smokers took them in their stride.

Home of the brave

The start of cigar-making on a commercial rather than a barter basis is credited to a woman. She was the wife of a Virginian tobacco worker known only as Prout, who had been brought to East Windsor in 1801 by two manufacturers of chewing tobacco. In the year of her migration to Connecticut, Mrs. Prout set up shop and put available females to work as rollers.

No one bothered about quality or wrapper color or the fact that leaf was improperly cured and that it had not gone through the essential process of fermentation. It was still a pioneering age; cigars were then a novelty to be smoked at one's own risk, and at the price for which they were sold no one could reasonably complain. The art of winding the wrapper was unknown and the use of a binder was still some years off. The spinning wheel and the loom were, for the time, set aside while nimble fingers dropped filler into a leaf large enough to serve as a wrapper. Then glue was applied to the wrapper for the length of the cigar. These "paste (or 'barnyard')

segars" were sold to storekeepers for a dollar to two dollars per thousand—a day's production for an experienced roller. Boxed and branded by their purchasers, this malodorous merchandise was retailed generally at a cent apiece in stores and taverns. In the latter, the shortest of these cigars soon acquired the nickname "twofers," being

sold to occasional guests at two for a cent. For steady customers they were free; they did increase thirst.

In retrospect it seems rather remarkable that the cigar industry in Connecticut didn't choke to death on its own product during its infancy. Survivors of the period, even though their taste was unsophisticated, provided direct

River Traffic at Hartford in 1840
From the I. N. Phelps Stokes Collection, New York Public Library

information for the published satiric comments about these early cigars. The probable explanation for the continuation of the industry in its awkward age lies in the character of Yankee thrift and habits. "Twofers" and companion cigars may have been too awful to smoke, but it would have been too sinful to waste them.

Rollers, peddlers, packers

Despite their defects, by modern standards, these homespun cigars found a considerable market outside of the locales of manufacture. That led to their physical improvement. Cigar factories as such were established for the first time in Connecticut at Suffield and East Windsor around 1810. The originators of the manufacturing industry, as apart from homes, were the Viets brothers. Samuel Viets had by chance come upon a wandering Cuban who understood the art of cigar rolling. He engaged him to teach his craft to a dozen or more women in a newly opened factory at Suffield.

It was not long before the noted Yankee peddlers, forerunners of the road salesmen, were including the manufactured article in colorful boxes or packages in their comprehensive merchandise. They offered this ware throughout the New England countryside in exchange for furs. By then these cigars had become standardized. There were the "Short Sixes," "Long Nines," and "Windsor Particulars" or "Supers." The first two derived their name from the number of cigars in a bundle and their size, the "Long Nines" being a pencil-thin type. "Supers" (from "superior") was a derisive term; smokers knew that somewhere there must be a better cigar. But "Supers"

did provide one considerable advantage for consumers. The wrapper was properly rolled and a slight twist made a kink at the mouth end which prevented it from unraveling.

Most of the cigars were composed of all-Connecticut leaf, or Connecticut filler and Cuban or Maryland wrapper. After factory operations were well established, Havana fillers with a Connecticut wrapper began to be used. This "half Spanish" cigar, a luxurious substitute for all "shoestring" leaf, had a favorable effect on local markets. A considerable business still continued, however, in the cheaper, cruder varieties.

"Long nines," for instance, were sold from farm homes for 75 cents to $1.25 per thousand. Bound with three bands in bundles of 25 or 50 and packed 5,000 to a barrel by purchasers, they were shipped to Boston and from there distributed to Atlantic seaport markets. They also went into the export trade. A New Haven firm sent considerable quantities to the West Indies where they were bought for use by slaves.

The manufacturing of cigars in Connecticut increased tobacco agriculture in the state. It had become profitable for farmers to expand their small plots, formerly just sufficient for a supply to a local factory and to provide for their own needs. The methods of curing were, of necessity, being improved though not much could be done to better leaf quality.

What has been called a "new era" in Connecticut's tobacco commerce occurred when a packing house was first established, around 1825, at Warehouse Point on the Connecticut River above East Windsor. Tobacco leaf had been haphazardly shipped out before this date.

Thereafter, through central warehouses, there was a degree of order in leaf transportation which improved in a short time. As other packing houses were erected, farmers began to bring wagon loads of tobacco to them and sell loose leaf to the warehousemen. This conversion of leaf depots to buying houses remained in effect until just before the mid-19th century, when farm sales at barns became the general practice.

The "sweated" leaf

Sometime in the early 1830's a shipment of leaf went off from Warehouse Point to a regular importer in Germany. In an effort to pack more with less labor, the tobacco was tightly compressed in oversize bundles. This instance of thrift had an unexpected reward. The leaf while on its long voyage underwent a natural fermentation, a process still something of a mystery to farmers and agriculturists.

An observant German at the receiving end, curious about the unusually pleasant aroma and the improved quality of Connecticut leaf, traced the effect to the "sweating" induced by tight packing. In order to bring about fermentation in transit or storage, thereafter it became standard practice to pack leaf closely. Open bales and such-like bundles gave way to cases holding 300 to 400 pounds of leaf. With this practical step the "era of specialization" in Connecticut's cigar-leaf industry began. The discovery that proper fermentation was essential for the mellowing of cured tobacco came just in time.

The bettered leaf

Tobacco was being produced in ever-increasing quantities in the United States by the late 1820's but none of it was grown specifically for cigars. There had been some experimental crops obtained from Havana seed planted in Florida which had resulted in a curious, spotted leaf that had a brief vogue. But in the States the effective culture of tobacco for use chiefly in cigars began in Connecticut.

"Shoestring" tobacco, while elastic enough, provided a wrapper of coarse appearance: a white-speckled "cinnamon" blotch. Cigar smokers were doggedly consuming what they were offered by Connecticut manufacturers. They were about to be rewarded for their patience.

"Bonanza tobacco"

Their benefactor was an intelligent farmer, B. P. Barber, of East Windsor. Surveying the possibilities, he decided that a variety of Maryland Broadleaf might very well thrive in the sandy soil of the Connecticut Valley. Either in 1830 or 1833, depending on which historian one accepts, he obtained seeds of the Maryland type. The date is less important than the result. After a number of experimental crops the transplant developed a leaf that was regarded as "elegant." It was light-bodied, almost tasteless, and had a fine finish—an ideal leaf in its time for binder. As it continued to improve under good crop management and its pattern became fixed, the leaf acquired characteristics that made it also excellent as a

wrapper. This factor was to become increasingly important as smokers became more discriminating, for the wrapper was what the buyer first saw and that eye appeal had a direct influence on sales.

This seedleaf type became shortly known as Connecticut Broadleaf. "Shoestring" tobacco was plowed under and farmers went enthusiastically into the production of the new type. Most of the crops had been grown around East Windsor. By 1840 harvests of Broadleaf in Connecticut's Tobacco Valley were in the range of a million pounds—fifty times the best production years of the colonial period. Growers spoke of the new leaf as a bonanza. Wise old farmers voiced the general opinion that there could never be a finer tobacco.

Around that time, too, the sorting of tobacco first began and became standard procedure. Only two grades were separated: filler and wrapper. The latter included all but the poorest leaves. A new production area was opened up in the Housatonic Valley in the early 1840's. The first crop for the market came from Kent, in Litchfield County, in 1845. It was not too long before the tobacco of the area was, for a while, to supply the finest of domestic wrapper leaf.

Wrapper up

A successful sale by a Connecticut dealer in the early 1840's made New York manufacturers aware of what their next-door neighbor was doing. Prior to that time Connecticut tobacco was being used in the big cigar-rolling center of New York for cheap cigars. But no one in that metropolis seemed to have been aware that Con-

necticut could supply a usable wrapper. A Bridgeport trader, John Moody, having on hand several tons of leaf acquired at the extremely low price of two cents a pound, sold the lot to a New York manufacturer. The latter had an oversupply of Havana filler but no wrapper leaf. His new purchase admirably met his requirements.

Thereafter, cigar manufacturers in New York turned to Connecticut farmers for wrappers. The price of Broadleaf wrapper around 1843 was seven cents a pound. The new market resulted in a steady rise in the price for a number of years. Connecticut crops of the newest type were sufficient to supply the major domestic factories, and considerable quantities were exported to Bremen, Germany. From there Connecticut leaf came back to America in the form of inexpensive cigars. Manufacturing in the states now had a solid base for expansion. Improved methods of fermenting leaf and the use of Cuban filler and Connecticut wrapper resulted in a cigar, the "Seed and Havana" type, which grew in consumer acceptance.

Owing to an expanding market Connecticut tobacco farmers followed a usual pattern and overproduced. Other factors added to their difficulties: increasing competition from the filler grown in Pennsylvania and Ohio, and the panic of 1873 which, for a while, caused a drop in the consumption of cigars.

Yankee Havana

Various trials with the sun-drenched seeds of Havana tobacco, supplied by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, had been made in the Valley since 1840 but results

had been unsatisfactory. Sometime in the early 1870's, under the supervision of state and federal soil and plant specialists, experiments were again undertaken with carefully selected Havana seeds.

New Haven, from Perry Hill, in 1848
Culver Pictures

The leaf finally obtained after a few crops was a delight to its growers. It was not only excellent as a binder but was far superior to any of domestic growth as a wrapper. And more wrappers could be obtained from

the newly developed type than from the Broadleaf then under cultivation. Ordinarily restrained government agriculturists described it in such glowing terms as "very handsome, showy tobacco . . . ," "fine burning qualities, sweetness of taste . . . ," "silkiness of leaf, which sweats to a good rich color."

Seeds were imported for each new sowing and the plants obtained from them for the first three years were known as "Spanish" or "Havana." After a necessary cultivation of four years in Connecticut soil the type acquired certain desired characteristics and was then called "Havana Seed." The tobacco grown on the east side of the Connecticut River differed markedly from that produced on the west side. The soil in the eastern area is more sandy; that in the western clayey. East-side leaf was finer and lighter-colored; that from the west side had more body and a less delicate fibre. Growers were getting a yield of over 2,500 pounds per acre and their product was bringing 40 cents and more per pound for wrappers around 1875. The wise old farmers said, "We were wrong about Broadleaf. This seed stuff is *really* the finest for wrappers." Once again they were premature.

By this time men of the soil had accepted a fact of nature, a fact which no one was ever clearly to understand. No matter whether seeds came from Virginia or Maryland types used for non-cigar purposes or from Cuba, when planted in Connecticut they evolved only into binder and wrapper types. In the years following its introduction into Connecticut, Havana Seed tobacco became generally known as "American," as distinct from

"Spanish." This leaf, made into "American cigars," and packed in cedar boxes, became leading sellers in tobacconists' shops.

Wrapper Valley

The new product of the Connecticut Valley was soon challenged. Farmers of the Housatonic Valley had gone into the production of Havana Seed. In a little while they developed a far superior leaf. The noted government tobacco specialist and historian, J. B. Killebrew, wrote:

> *It is generally conceded by dealers and manufacturers that the finest tobacco for wrappers comes from the Housatonic Valley, having all the silkiness of texture and burning qualities of the Connecticut Valley leaf and all the desirableness of color of Pennsylvania Seedleaf. In elasticity of leaf, in fineness of face, and richness of color it stands unrivalled, and brings a higher price in the market than any other seed leaf grown in the United States.*

The leaf of the Housatonic Valley had a further, though unexpected, advantage over the Connecticut Valley type. It was of a darker color than the latter and it remained in demand when, unaccountably, American cigar consumers rather suddenly showed a preference for a dark wrapper. This competitive advantage was maintained until the 1880's when consumer taste shifted back to a light-colored wrapper. Thereafter, Connecticut Valley farmers, who had adopted various

methods such as dipping leaf in licorice and special sweating to bring about a darker color, were able to return to the standard routines of production.

There was little difference in the cost of raising tobacco in the two Valleys. Depending on its proximity to the railroad, good tobacco land was available in the Housatonic Valley at from $50 to $200 an acre in the late 1870's. The yield of an acre was about 2,000 pounds, of which three-fifths was suitable as wrappers. The average cost of bringing in an acre of tobacco was $152 in the late 1870's; the gross return averaged around $373 an acre. Farm hands were paid $18 to $20 a month together with room and board. The culture of tobacco was fairly general in Fairfield County and more extensive in Litchfield County in that period.

Craftsmen and planners

By 1880 the major cigar-making centers in the states were New York City and Philadelphia. Connecticut makers could only lean on history and remind anyone interested that their fathers had pioneered the industry in the states. The census record of 1880 put Connecticut in 19th place in this manufacturing field.

There were in that year 125 factories in the state with an output of about 25 million hand-rolled cigars worth $787,383 at the source. (The national production total in that year was around 2.5 billion.) The Internal Revenue Bureau did quite well with cigars and cheroots in fiscal 1880; it collected nearly $140,000 in Connecticut from retail sales of those commodities. Cigarettes were hardly worth the bookkeeping—the total tax came to $29.58 in the same period.

By the early 1880's farmers were becoming increasingly aware that a green thumb was not invariably dependable. Science was being utilized on an increasing scale and studies were being made of fertilizers, soils and leaf quality. All this was to have a valuable effect on crop management.

Tropical intruder

Excellent as the wrapper leaf of Connecticut was, it soon faced a dangerous foreign competitor. European manufacturers had for some time been using Sumatran wrappers for cigars. Only two pounds of it was required to cover a thousand cigars of regular size as against five to ten pounds of Connecticut leaf. The East Indies product was practically unknown in the States until a sample shipment of this light-colored, finely textured leaf of bland flavor came to the attention of New York manufacturers around 1876.

Increasing orders went out for Sumatran tobacco, which was imported as filler on which the duty was lower than on wrapper. Alarmed farmers in the Connecticut and Housatonic Valleys formed the New England Tobacco Growers Association in 1883. This organization persuaded the Congress to increase the duty from 35 cents to 75 cents a pound. As this had no apparent effect on curbing imports, the tariff went to $2.00 in 1890. It was reduced in 1894 to $1.50 for three years; then it went to $1.85. The successive duties did not have the hoped-for result. Five million pounds of leaf came in from Sumatra in 1900, and imports were increased as domestic cigar consumption rose.

Glittering shade

Meanwhile, for the farmers of the Valleys, a ray of hope appeared. It was focused on the word "shade."

Under federal supervision attempts had been made in Florida to duplicate, or at least approximate, the silken wrapper leaf of Sumatra with seeds from that island. The initial efforts were a failure until the fortunate discovery that a desired leaf could be obtained when protected by the shade of trees. Experimentally, coverings of thin, closely spaced slats and, finally, tents of cotton cloth were erected under which tobacco was grown. As a result a "perfect" Florida-grown wrapper was acquired by 1898.

This was a competitive leaf that could not be restricted by a tariff protecting Connecticut farmers. Growers in the Connecticut Valley turned to experts at the Connecticut Agricultural College (founded as an agricultural school by Augustus and Charles Storrs in 1881), to those at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, and to soil authorities of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

The soil of Connecticut was found to be similar to that part of Florida where Sumatran seeds had developed a fine wrapper leaf. Independent experiments were conducted by the specialists. A half acre was sown at Poquonock, Connecticut, with Sumatran seeds of one year's growth in Florida. Elsewhere in 1900 a smaller tract was set out with the Floridian seed; other tracts with Havana.

The Sumatran variety seemed to be what the specialists were looking for. In 1901 around 41 acres were set under shade supervised by men from the U. S. Bureau of

Soils and directed by Marcus L. Floyd of East Windsor. The crop met all expectations. In order to publicize the event and invite competition from manufacturers, the harvest of 300 bales was auctioned in Hartford in May 1902. Some bales brought $2.65, none less than $1.40 per pound.

The highest price per pound paid for Connecticut wrapper leaf prior to that date had been 40 cents. News headlines sent the tidings dramatically across the state: ". . . the salvation of the Connecticut farmer was at hand . . . no more hard times." A leaf gold rush followed. Valley farmers bought seeds in Florida indiscriminately, paying as high as $2.00 an ounce. Despite the urgent advice of state and federal experts to give the new plant further trial and to restrict production, land with light, sandy soil was bought at extravagant costs. As a result, fields set out to wrapper tobacco increased to 700 acres.

Turning over a new leaf

The growing season in 1902 was cold and wet and the tobacco so poor it had no market. Wrappers sold at losses of 75 to 90 percent and many newly formed companies failed. Stubbornly blaming the weather, the Valley farmers repeated their mistake in 1903, again with disastrous results. Then they retired, leaving the field to men willing to work out a partnership with nature.

A specialist from the U. S. Bureau of Plant Industry supervised a succession of plantings in search for uniformity. From one field a superior crop developed from

Cuban seeds. Unlike its richly flavored parent, it was completely bland in taste. Experimentally, some of the wrappers were entered in an exhibition at St. Louis in 1904 and won a prize. But the supervising expert was not fully satisfied—nor was he to be for quite a few years.

A View of Hartford in 1874
Culver Pictures

The seeds of numerous varieties continued to be planted, a specific seed to each separate acre. Of the many specimens that finally evolved, four types were found to have merit. Among these were Uncle Sam Sumatra and Hazlewood Cuban.

It was the latter that received approval as best for growing under shade in Connecticut soil, and potentially the most profitable. That was in 1910. Time was to confirm the correctness of the choice. Seed selection among Connecticut Valley farmers became so expert and so precise that experienced Cuban farmers turned to buying tobacco seeds from the Yankees.

What the country needed

The use of cigars in the United States had reached a point by 1904 where 60 cents of the tobacco-consumer's dollar went for that article. An increasing demand for cigar leaf raised production in Connecticut so that by 1921 a record was established. In that year the harvest of all cigar types was over 44.3 million pounds, with a crop value of nearly $14 million. Wrapper leaf accounted for more than 13 percent of the total production with a value close to $6 million. The high mark of domestic sales had been 1920, when over 8 billion cigars were passed across to customers at retail counters.

The century of cooperatives

In an effort to maintain fair prices for their product, Connecticut farmers instituted a novel marketing pattern in the United States. A warehouse system had been organized at Hartford in 1852 by one Seymour whose first name is lost somewhere in the archives. This was the original of a series of cooperatives formed by Connecti-

cut Valley farmers. The cooperative disbanded in 1862 and was temporarily reorganized in 1870. Its second career was brief.

Intermittently, mutual associations of growers continued to be formed in Connecticut, some fairly inclusive, some only local in membership. They were ineffectual, partly because of the independence of farmers who, inexperienced in the function of cooperatives, demanded higher prices for their tobacco than the market warranted. Some later commentators laid part of the blame to poor management. Around 1922 the noted attorney, Aaron Sapiro, who had successfully formed agricultural cooperatives in the United States and Canada, established a new Connecticut association.

This one started out well enough, with five-year growers' contracts, but for a number of reasons, of which over-production was given as the major one, the organization terminated its career in 1928. For the next two decades Connecticut farmers were on their own. Then the Conn-Mass Tobacco Cooperative came into existence in 1949. Agricultural economists regard this as the most substantial and effective local organization to date in its field.

Cigar revival

In the post-war years of the early 1920's the consumer pattern in the states took on a different character. The new mode of using tobacco became concentrated on the cigarette, and its rate of increase rapidly affected the popularity of the cigar. The years of the great depression also had its effect; then, after World War II, production

of Connecticut Valley cigar leaf showed some improvement. Today, cigar consumption in the States is in the range of its banner years. A growing consumer interest has given impetus to promotional methods and brought about the introduction of new brands and new styles in cigars.

Tobacco has been woven into the fabric of Connecticut history for more than three centuries. In the colonial period its record was one of mere continuity rather than dramatic interest. Then, early in the national period, Yankee ingenuity took a leaf that was something of an orphan in the market places and converted it into a salable commodity—the cigar. That initiated a new national industry.

Influenced by the growing commerce in cigars, Connecticut farmers sought to improve the basic product. Their successful search for a better leaf resulted in a new agriculture in America. That achievement was twice repeated until, finally, the production of excellent binder and wrapper leaf became almost a monopoly of the state. Thus, the industrial imagination and drive of some progressive inhabitants gave Connecticut a unique place in the long history of tobacco through a series of pioneering achievements .

Data relating to the current agriculture of shade-grown tobacco and associated subjects in Connecticut were obtained from The Shade Tobacco Growers Agricultural Association, Inc.; Economic Research Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture; various publications of the Department's Agricultural Marketing Service; booklets issued by the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station and by the Storrs Agricultural Experiment Station, College of Agriculture, University of Connecticut. Information on tobacco manufacturing and commerce came from the Connecticut Dept. of Labor; various compilations of the U.S. Dept of Commerce, the Internal Revenue Service, and the National Association of Tobacco Distributors' *Coordinator;* on cigarette taxation, Excise Section, Connecticut Tax Dept., and the published reports of the Tobacco Tax Council.

The chief sources of information dealing with earlier periods were *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut,* vol. 1, ed. J. H. Trumbull (1850); *The History of Ancient Windsor, Connecticut,* Henry R. Stiles (1859); "Report on Tobacco," J. B. Killebrew, and "Statistics of Manufacturers of Tobacco," J. R. Dodge, both in the Tenth Census, 1880 (1883); "Hartford County Tobacco," by Fred S. Brown and "Suffield," by H. S. Sheldon, both in *Memorial History of Hartford County,* ed. J. H. Trumbull (1886); *Production of Cigar-Wrapper Tobacco,* J. B. Stewart (1908); *History of Hartford County,* Charles W. Burpee (1928); *The History of Tobacco Production in the Connecticut Valley,* Elizabeth Ramsey, in Smith College Studies in History, XV (1930), *A History of Tobacco Production in New England,* Clarence I. Hendrickson, Storrs Agricultural Experiment Station, Connecticut Agricultural College (Oct. 1931), *The Economic Development of the Cigar Industry,* W. N. Baer (1933); *The History of Tobacco Production in Connecticut,* Historical Pub. no. LII, Tercentenary Commission of the State of Connecticut, Adrian F. McDonald (1936).

The quotations on pages 20-21 are from Trumbull's edition of the *Records* cited above; the first on page 22 is from *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society,* 5th Series, vol. viii (1882), the second is from Trumbull's edition; that on page 23 is from *History of Greenfield,* F. M. Thompson (1900); that on page 39 is from Killebrew's "Report," cited above.

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